

3 July 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

**SUBJECT: Proposal to Transfer Certain Responsibilities
and Staff Functions of BGN to CIA (for
Foreign Geographic Names)**

REFERENCE: (a) Tentative Letter (undated) ER 8-4143
from Assistant Secretary of the Interior to DCI

(b) Memorandum for the Record dated 20 August 1954
signed by Otto E. Guthe, Subject: Conversation
with Messrs. Davis, Beaseley, and Marr, of the
Office of the Secretary, Department of the Interior,
20 August 1954

(c) Public Law 242--80th Congress
(Chapter 330--1st Session) (S. 1262)
Approved 25 July 1947

I have arrived at the following tentative conclusions as a result of the study of the above references and informal discussion held yesterday afternoon with Lawrence R. Houston, CIA Legal Counsel:

a. From a practical point of view there appears to be no reason why the present staff of the Office of Geography, Interior, could not be transferred to CIA and operate in support of the NIS Gazetteer program. There might be a question, however, respecting the support of additional foreign name requirements of other agencies of the Government. Should such a transfer occur, it would be necessary to increase the T/O proportionately.

b. With respect to the legal aspects of reference (a), the problem is not quite so clear. The import of the penultimate paragraph is to the effect that the Secretary of the Interior would disassociate himself from the responsibilities with respect to foreign geographic names in contradiction to reference (c) which specifically assigns these responsibilities to the Secretary. On the other hand, should the Secretary continue to retain such responsibilities the intent of Congress would not be violated or

1 - Office of Geography
1 - NIS Program
1 - ~~Area~~ Special Studies


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circumscribed, and the operation of developing foreign geographic names under BGN policies and decisions could be carried out by CIA with the confidence that such names would receive sanction as official standard names.

c. The matter of public gazetteers raises a further question. According to Section 3 of reference (c) the Act is designed to serve the interests not only of the Federal Government but also the general public in which latter field CIA cannot operate. It would therefore be necessary for the public gazetteer program to be carried out under the general authority and responsibility of the Secretary operating through BGN.

d. Any arrangements which might be worked out as a result of matters raised in the foregoing paragraphs would certainly have to be finally cleared with the Bureau of the Budget. The Legal Counsel agrees on this point. He further raises the question of NSC approval were CIA to undertake this activity as a matter of common concern to the intelligent community.

e. The question of whether or not this transfer should be made in the general interests of continuing this capability is dependent upon what actions Interior might take in the event CIA turned down the proposal.



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From a realistic viewpoint, conditions may not continue to be favorable for either of these alternatives to operate. The present regime in the Department of the Interior obviously intends to get rid of foreign name work. This was revealed by reference (b) where Interior officials showed every intent of doing this even to the possible extent of liquidating the Office of Geography. Under such circumstances it would be preferable that planned arrangements be undertaken to transfer these activities to some other department of the government. Whether or not CIA is the logical repository is a matter for further examination. One could argue for State as being the logical recipient of such responsibilities. Whatever final arrangements are made, they should satisfy the best interests of and reflect the consensus of the agencies represented on the BGN.

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